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ABSTRACT

Educators have been very aware of the crisis due to student unrest, which in turn is due to political, economic, or racial tensions. Another crisis is at hand: students, like others in our society, have developed a distrust of authority, and consequently of traditional education. Vocational schools are flourishing because they have weeded out the indigestibles and offer immediately useful skills. College teachers must learn to communicate higher education's worth to students. The major problem today in college teaching is boredom; this perception is borne out in a survey of student attitudes. Simple, unexaggerated concern for student welfare would improve the communication lines, as would a sincere effort to create interest. Another technique is for teachers to point out the implications and modern-day importance of the materials discussed in class, and not leave that conceptual leap to the students alone. The four professorial myths to be debunked are that: (1) students are lazy and unintelligent; (2) the holder of the terminal degree automatically becomes a good teacher; (3) teachers must become like students in order to be effective; and (4) knowing the subject well precludes knowing how to teach it. (Author/MSE)

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THE OTHER CRISIS

by

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We all know about the crisis faced by schools from elementary to college level, due to student unrest caused by political, economic or racial tensions. Since the late fifties, thousands of books, pamphlets and articles have been published, trying to analyze the situation and to suggest remedies of pedagogical and fiscal nature. Although the end of the Vietnam War has temporarily calmed the restless heads, much resentment continues to linger on.

But there is another crisis that continues relentlessly, eroding the foundations of our educational establishment. It

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is far less visible and has not been heavily publicized, although many perceptive researchers seem to be aware of it. Yet, little fuss is made over this condition, and the public may often just consider it an aspect of the general unrest created by doubt and frustration. However, over the long run, it may affect more students and teachers than the riots of the recent past.

Children disbelieve parents, sharpening their rebellion capacity just before they confront college and university teachers. Congregations disbelieve clergymen. Patients doubt the wisdom of medical men, and sue for alleged malpractice. Blacks do not believe whites. Voters bemoan the lack of candidates whom they can trust. Stockholders charge misrepresentation among corporate executives. Labor and the public doubt each other's motives.

Today's students are infected by this condition: there is massive distrust of instructors. Students come from another generation with differing values. They are entirely different from those with whom teachers were acquainted when they went to school. Ergo: new methods and new types of instruction are needed today.

Yet, despite these circumstances, students come from the same physical world most instructors have come from, or live in.

Teaching is somewhat like the dozen tomato plants some professors plant in May, as they may have done for years. In

one season perhaps ten die. Perhaps all twelve die. The professor cannot simply say: "The stock was inferior. I'm blameless. I'll complain to the nursery." Their passing may well have been due to freakish weather; the professor could and should have protected them. It may well be he applied improper fertilizer, or no fertilizer, or fertilizer that was too strong. If one plant died, perhaps it was a weak plant. But to blame the passing of all twelve onto the nursery is absurd. It is likely that the professor himself is to blame. He might have purchased and applied the right fertilizer. He could have protected his plants against frost; the weather forecasts warned him of this danger. He could have sieved out chunks too strong for plants to digest. The professor failed to protect and fertilize properly, and if he does not recognize these signals, he's doomed to repeat the same mistake.

Today, vocational schools are flourishing because they have weeded out the indigestibles, and offer rich red meat with few or no frills. They teach useful, immediately applicable knowledge. They too have a drop-out rate, but they're obviously succeeding by concentrating on material that meets students' expectations. They have a program for less gifted students -- without penalty; quite likely the most favorable environment for learning.

Four year colleges have much to offer. No one disputes the value of these institutions. Yet, why aren't these colleges and universities getting across what they offer to better advantage?

Does all this really matter?

It surely does, particularly if we want to avoid clash and turmoil through a campaign coming from the top. For if ever people were strategically placed, and capable to run such a crusade (which is absolutely non-political), it is college and university professors who can nourish young persons' self-esteem, recognize their worth, build self-confidence, create a truthful pride in the past upon which to erect a glowing future, build a well-edged capacity to deal with a sometimes scary future, and a stabilizing faith in that future. Two points: first, certainly higher education is as valuable as it ever was, but it must adapt; second, it must better communicate this value to students. Why isn't it doing it?

That the nations's teaching establishment can do more to counter the drop-out rate and avoid subsequent penalities to individuals and society seems clear.

* * * * * * * * *

In a recent lecture by Dr. Lee Noel, regional vice president of the American College Testing Program, he stated: "The most potent force on a campus, in terms of retention or loss, is a faculty member who cares." A glance at attrition rates among American colleges and universities shows this factor among some colleges to be sky high. At present, the author of this article is engaged in a study that may come up with surprising figures about the situation involving countless dropouts among talented students and numerous changes to other

careers among disillusioned teachers.

This loss and resulting individual and societal penalties are too much to dismiss. Putting the same concept another way: the major problem today in college and university teaching is boredom. Consequently, we can assume that if the major problem, boredom, is corrected, and instructors begin building interest, the injury to self and penalties to students and society will lessen. Confirmation of this conclusion lies in an advertising maxim, stated lately by the eminent practitioner David Ogilvie: "You cannot bore people into buying your product." The parallel is clear: "You cannot bore students into learning dull lessons."

THE CT SURVEY

There is an interesting random survey going on at present in the Western half of the State of Ohio. The author has conducted a pilot study of students' objections to current teaching practises, and during these interviews has asked students to identify those practises, traits, attitudes, policies, and characteristics which diminish interest and which otherwise would build interest among students in the instructor.[1] And subse-

[1]The research technique known as focussed group interviewing is a well-known and widely accepted method for gaining information of a qualitative nature. Its usefulness requires: (a) a clear conceptualization of the problem, (b) moderating the sessions in such a way as to elicit free and frank discussion, and (c) organizing the material in a comprehensive way so as to stumulate fruitful thinking about the issue under investigation. Although the interviewer in this instance followed a memorized series of questions, he sought to keep the conversation going spontaneously between himself and the respondents, and among respondents themselves in order to explore areas of interest as thoroughly as possible. (See next page).

quently, in the course's material as well. The results of this CT survey, limited to the Western half of Ohio at this time, are quite specific on what is required when an instructor seeks to build interest.

HOW TO ENGINEER DISINTEREST AMONG STUDENTS

The major conclusion reached in this pilot survey is that there is an art of creating communication from which emanates interest. In a sense, an instructor is like any publication; publications cannot bore, or they soon vanish. Yet, some teachers bore, and yet they endure! Therefore, to build interest among students, the instructor himself must be interesting. To be interesting, an instructor must know his audience, like his students, and deliver material appealing to them. And to make his message appealing, is there any reason why he cannot use modern communications techniques and concepts? Educators can

(cont.)

UNIVERSITY and/or COLLEGE	DATE & HOUR	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
University of Toledo	Community & Tech. College business majors	
a. Jan Claybaugh....	Wed May 19th, 1976 12 p.m.	7
b. Cindy Black.....	(ditto) 12:30 p.m.	6
c. James J. Jacobs..	Thu May 20th, 1976 1 p.m.	6
Bowling Green State University, liberal arts students		
Cecilia Feltman..	Fri May 21st, 1976 2 p.m.	5
University of Cincinnati, engineering students		
Ted Backus.....	Thu July 1st, 1976 9 a.m.	3
Ohio State University	fine arts students	
Andy Zerman.....	Thu July 1st, 1976 2:30 p.m.	4
Wittenberg University	liberal arts students	
Fred Selyo.....	Fri July 2nd, 1976 9 a.m.	3
Edison State College	junior college students,business majors	
Rick Rich.....	Fri July 2nd, 1976 3 p.m.	3

indeed use these techniques to the benefit of all.

It is axiomatic in the business world that: (a) salesmen must know their prospects well, (b) advertising must be directed specifically to certain groups, (c) business operates today under the marketing concept: give the customer what he wants and what he will buy. Business must know its audience. But American pedagogy seems to disagree, still saying that students measure up to preconceived standards, otherwise they fail the course.

This axiom can be applied to instructors as well, demanding they tailor their offerings to students.

Students time and time again have indicated they· (a) dislike irrelevant material, (b) formal language, (c) too many diversions from the course's main thrust, and (d) dry-as-dust lectures. Such practises seem to automatically engineer disinterst and discontent.

These stumbling stones can be eliminated by attention to principles of interesting communication.

HCW TO BUILD INTEREST AMONG STUDENTS

It has been found that most students seem to prefer: (a) featured material of short duration, (b) vignettes of short, sharp descriptive material related to their lives, (c) TV-like, humorous, quick takes and graphics. The inescapable conclusion is that newspaper formats and television commercials have had their effect on young people. Newspaper jargon describes their desire for sections, zoning, capsules, wrap-up stories, well-

rounded brief profiles of personalities and their views. Television has played its part during childhood as students today seek crisp presentation of the material -- preferably in short, sharp, 60-to-90 second bursts.

After all, in worried, hurried America everybody's attention span is short.

THE NEW APPROACH

Some instructors are undoubtedly adept at delivering information. The better they communicate the more rapid will this process be. They contend they are efficient purveyors of facts and data, sufficint for students to make judgments. The more factual the information the more quickly are students likely to arrive at that judgment, say they. But! Not all minds operate quite so mechanically. It is not enough to merely feed the data. Students today are full of emotion. The instructor who realizes this begins to build interest of a different kind than that allegedly generated by the factual, lecture approach. Inefficiency in receiving and retaining information is evident among many students. This, then, requires a rebuilding of the instructor's transfer ability[2] and a restructuring of his material to compel open senses, thus engaging the student's mind and memory as well.

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[2]Transfer ability is the capacity to generate eager receptivity and willing retention of verbal and written material. The quality and quantity of material transferred is enhanced through interest built within students by the instructor.

This is where building interest in the subject by an interesting instructor enters. Once achieved, greater attention, greater receptivity, and greater retention is likely to occur. This conclusion is supported by the attention, receptivity, and retention generated through modern media techniques. Once this level is reached, boredom caused by repetition becomes less likely, and penalties for students, instructor, and college become less severe.

"MY PERSONALITY DOESN'T LET ME DO THINGS LIKE THAT!"...

There are instructors who believe firmly their classrooms must be staid, starchy and calm, where the teacher delivers priceless information in a straightforward manner. They may say "Horrors! Me act? Me become emotional in a classroom? Never!" Their fears are unfounded, because no special personality is required to act and emote; perhaps that of an extrovert is not required. They need not get out of character. It means only this: caring about students and showing them you care. It means thinking about students as individuals with problems and needs, rather than as students who must meet the instructor's standards, or else! This is the fastest way to build interest: simply care. Building interest depends on eliminating negative factors largely incorporated in certain pedagogical myths that attribute special values to formal starchiness, as will be shown later in this article.

The best illustration of not caring from the CT student pilot survey is this: "I'd suffered an automobile accident on Tuesday, requiring six stitches in my chin. On Thursday I

approached the two profs on the concourse whose tests I'd missed as a result of the accident. Inquiry concerning times when I could make up the missed tests showed these profs grudgingly setting hours at their convenience. Not a word about the visible bandage, my health, other injuries, nothing! In short, they were concerned only with their convenience and comfort!"

Caring does not require exaggerated emotions.

Once an instructor begins to care he searches for interest-building devices within himself and in the classroom, tryirg to include wit, presence, and perhaps histrionics in his presentation. He becomes sensitive to the great interest students have in positive, strong performances on the stage and on the television screen.

Thirty years ago a solitaire game was enough to entertain. Today entertainment revolves around the tube. It isn't necessary to be an accomplished actor of stage and television, even though the individual instructor is competing for interest generated by such people. The idea here is to use such techniques, <u>their</u> techniques. Students have been preconditioned to entertainment. To this extent instructors must be that much more interesting.

Both stage and television screen are competitors to any instructor and his "stuff"; he can learn much from both. This leads automatically to the conclusion that to build interest as strong as that generated by stage and television, an instructor must adopt similar appealing devices. In sum, the instructor must make a sincere effort to interest. He must give a good performance. To do that he is obliged to: (a) say something important, (b) do it interestingly by being a convincing actor-instructor. Once

he's on the way to building interest, he becomes dominant rather than submissive, the product of long hours of poring over books and writing theses. He begins to perform with eyes, body, and voice. As in poetry, something happens to his words. He becomes an arresting, interesting figure of convincing discussions. Perhaps he even becomes a spellbinder.

How often does a biology teacher point out electrically the social implications of meiosis and mitosis?

* * * * * * * *

The fact is that teaching today is 95% lecture-and-test, and does not correspond to students' expectations, requirements, and society's eventual needs. To a great extent the teaching establishment fails to point out implications and modern day importance of the material discussed. For example: what relationship does teaching at a small, sun-dappled campus in Central Ohio have to 750 murders committed annually in Detroit? How can liberal arts students in a small, upper New York State college expect to compete in shifty corporate boardrooms and the Wall Street jungle with its modern financial manipulations? How can one possibly study problems of a black ghetto in an Illinois university's Elysian fields when the answers, let alone the problems, aren't even applicable? Yet, faculties and administrations at each of these institutions are convinced they're doing an adequate up-to-date job of training young people.

The jump between book-learning and the real world must be made by students alone. How often do instructors seek to relate their material to reality?

It is this disparity that makes the difference. For men, in our case professors, live and die by their myths, or lack of these. It doesn't matter whether the myth, non-factual in its connotation, is well-fitted or ill-fitted to current society. Men live by them. And the conviction that a professor, forcing memorization of Hamlet's important passages, is training students for the future, can and undoubtedly does damage some students' self-confidence. The learner, judged on his ability to memorize, and found unable to do this, then feels inadequate.

Indisputably, there is much value in Shakespeare's masterpiece. Unfortunately, relevancy is usually ignored. Also: the idea that a professor, lecturing monotonously with facts gleaned from the latest sociological seminar, could influence lives favorbly with these facts, is a mirage. Because today, in many respects, the way material is presented to students is as important as what is delivered. It is true, knowledge can be undermined by the way it's presented.

The idea that any faculty's committee work is sacred is self-defeating, because such work reduces results (and in the meantime reduces teaching effectiveness) to the lowest common denominator of indolence and fear. The allegation that teachers and teaching are "obsolete" and "unresponsive," is partially provoked by the dull authority in front of the class devoted to hollow facts and rhetoric. Some professors, like the students they deplore, have forgotten how to make their audience listen effectively. These inadequacies have only hurt education as a whole.

* * * * * * * *

PROFESSORIAL MYTH No. 1

> Students are lazy, seeking to minimize study; they are products of low-standard public and parochial schools. Most students have to be spoon-fed.

In reality, the CT survey showed time and again students are asking simple things: first, "...treat us as adults"; second, "don't insult us."

The first request stems from students' home lives. Having discovered the "tunnel of love" in their early teens, protective parents -- products of a preceding generation -- have sought to restrain them in these delights. Teen-agers rebel at this. This rebellion carries over into the classroom against professors who continue to treat them as unknowing children.

The second objection, "...don't insult us," is a simple plea to stop such things as:

1. "Okay, students. Here's the syllabus. Do as outlined. There are 150 students in the class. I will award one A, three Bs seven Cs, and 75 Ds at the end of the quarter. The rest of you can drop out now or later."

2. Instrustors who give objective tests, but who have assistants who have not participated in the course but who then administer tests. They cannot clarify ambiguous wording or excuse the instructor's lack of interest.

3. Comments such as these in a review session: (a) "Why didn't you ask that when the material was covered weeks ago!" (b) "That question is inappropriate!" (c) "Not a suitable question!" (d) "Any questions except the answer to the question at hand are uncalled for!"

4. Not keeping office hours.

5. Returning graded tests 2-3 weeks late.

PROFESSORIAL MYTH No. 2

> The holder of a terminal degree is automatically a teacher.

There are instructors who hate students. Not only does this negative emotion make them ineffective teachers, but this condition is likely to be perpetuated by degree and tenure. The "I-hate-students" attitude is developed as an instructor, deep in his heart, enamored of his research status, resents having to teach. Faculty recognition and promotion procedures are frequently depressants.

Time and again the CT survey showed students want a knowledgeable person in the classroom, one that's warm, animated, and helpful, not one who delivers slanted, sarcastic, resentful remarks. Nor do students want excessive poking into their private lives from an instructor. All they ask is an authority transmitting precise, currently usable knowledge delivered in a friendly, helpful, interesting manner. In sum, students seem to confirm the very basis for an educational establishment's existence: an expert who delivers usable information interestingly they can't get elsewhere. Counter to this are instructors who believe it is easy to get an education, even sitting on a garbage can in an alley, <u>if the student has the determination</u>. But the better way to do it is to institutionalize education. Successive student generations quickly realize that it's more efficient to learn from a helpful, friendly, sympathetic, interesting authority in a classroom <u>despite what that authority may believe about students' intellects</u>.

<u>Transfer ability</u> is the key to any educator's success, no matter what subject is involved. What makes the difference between one teacher and another, and eventually between one establishment

and the other, is the individual instructor's manner and preparation -- his transfer ability -- how he comes across as a person, as a source of information, as a representative of the college or university, as someone who starts with people students. It's Bruno Bettleheim, eminent psychologist, who says people-students need:

*strong moral support
*treatment as individual entities
*help in determining themselves

Would not caring professors furnish this support?

One of the stronger objections from respondents in the CT pilot student survey lies in a department's substituting a graduate student for the professor scheduled to teach a course. In this case, the professor doesn't even attempt to transfer knowledge! Compounding all this is one Midwestern school's chemistry department, well populated with East Indian students, using such Indians as instructors. These foreigners, deserving and cooperative, frequently cannot communicate, the language barrier being too formidable. The use of graduate students, as revealed in the CT survey, is almost unforgivable. Most grad student-instructors' main aim is to stay in grad school, not instruct. Their preparation and knowledge is often minimal. Transfer ability is virtually zero, or at best second-hand. Grad students rely heavily on the textbook. Students discover this and tend to skip classes, studying elsewhere and frequently acing tests and courses. "Why go to class?" they ask. Other complaints are: "...not much meat," and "...too mechanical."

It's fine to earn a terminal degree and be accepted as an

expert. Academicians are programmed today to believe that with such a degree the holder is automatically a teacher. But does the holder have professional transfer ability? His sheepskin or degree in no way makes him a capable provider of knowledge.

PROFESSORIAL MYTH No. 3

> "I'm obliged to become one of the students to make it relevant."

There are responses to this myth. First, the instructor grows a beard, wears bluejeans and sweatshirt, and sloshes around in sandals. He may well call students by their first names, and in turn delights in being called "Jim." The CT student survey shows a neutral response to a number of things which instructors previously assumed to be important, one of which relates to attire.

> 37% of respondents were neutral about bluejeans and sweatshirt
> 49% were neutral concerning instructors' beards

The survey also shows indifference to first and last names:

> 35% of students-respondents showed indifference to the instructor's calling them by their first names
> 34% showed indifference or no opinion to an instructor's calling them by their last names
> 37% were neutral concerning formal titles of Miss, Ms., Mrs., and Mr. On this question, on a scale of ±365 points students gave a total score of -13.5, an amazing non-reactive score.

In sum, students attach great importance to these factors: (a) just be human, (b) be natural, don't be artificial, and(c) just care.

The second response is from the instructor who says: "No!

I will not wear bluejeans, no beard, and I won't smoke pot!"

However, counter to both responses, the CT student pilot survey shows no student expresses actual preference for similarity of attire and attitudes. Instructors need not be "groovy." Instead, the survey shows students will listen to things yet unheard and unlearned. The emerging image is clear: "If we took away college requirements, classrooms, grades, and diplomas, would the instructor's words be worth listening to? Another example:

> "Perhaps we should go back to the one-room schoolhouse where practical experience and life were taught, and not a single individual's bunch of crap. Who gives a damn when the Erie Canal was built, anyhow? Should this determine the kind of job I get? Really!"

Students aren't saying all instruction is inferior. They're protesting a lack of relevance and a dearth of important knowledge. Liberal arts instruction frequently requires memorization of useless lists, dates, trivia. Instead of an instructor's intellectualizing, say, Shakespeare, students would like him to engage in meaningful dialog. Example of irrelevant instructions follows:

> PROFESSOR ..."...and now we come to one of Shakespear's great scenes, that where Lady Macbeth says: "Out, out, damned spot." Ah, sublime; Ah, tragic!"

What students want is relevant comment, thus:

> PROFESSOR ..."...now, the scene where Lady Macbeth washes her hands in an attempt to cleanse herself of participation in Duncan's murder. (INTENSELY) Imagine, if you will, former president Richard M. Nixon in the White House during the summer of 1973. He wrings his hands, he offers supplications, he seeks purification. The important

point here is that Lady Macbeth was, and President Nixon was, and still is, a human being full of weaknesses and contradictions."

In sum, students are saying: "Why ask us irrelevant questions? We demand important, usable content. The Panama Canal today is important. We want to understand it before we vote to give it up. Political conventions are important. What will happen to the present three materialistic systems of capitalism, socialism, and communism is important. Relate, man relate!"

PROFESSORIAL MYTH No. 4

"It's not important how I say it. What's important is that I know my subject!"

The CT survey shows two things: first, it is important what an instructor says, and second, it's important the way it is said. Students overwhelmingly replied: instructors must be good public speakers. This gives rise to the standard student complaint: "He's dull, uninteresting, and boring!" Students may say this as an insult, or in derision, but the truth is that too many instructors are viewed this way, truthfully. They are boring. Notice these remarks:

"...must have a rhythmic voice."
80% of student-respondents endorse this

"...must have inflection in voice."
83% affirmed this.

"...must use good diction."
100% of students demand this.

"...must not mispronounce words."
88% insisted upon this.

Instructors violating these public speaking demands run

a strong risk of being labeled, "...uninteresting, boring."

After all, students go through registration procedures because they care enough; not all of them were fooling when they went through the financial motions of paying fees. There are some, if not all, who really do want to learn and can learn if they're not bored to a drop-out status. It's not demeaning for an instructor to pay attention to these details.

That voices are important at many levels of endeavor is confirmed by the fact that former President Nixon underwent voice coaching after his 1960 defeat by John F. Kennedy.

Instructors must realize that if all they can provide is dissemination of facts, they have strong competition in the form of books and journals. These sources are normally less costly, more durable than the lectures delivered in a classroom, and sometimes even more accurate. But books have no personality, and a live mentor can be so much more inspiring or entertaining. If instructors remain dry and dull, they may lose the audience to be instructed!

Education is somewhat like the tomato planting image. Everybody is angry with students, deploring their lack of response. The SAT scores are going down. Everybody is dousing them with criticism-fertilizer ("crit-fert") to some students), just as some professors douse their twelve tomato plants, never stopping to consider whether the fertilizer is right, whether it's too strong, whether it's too granular. In short, the CT student pilot survey seems to be saying:

"Seasons change. So does the climate. The fertilizer you used 20 years ago may not work with today's students. You need different fertilizer for us."

If our school administrators don't listen, if our instructors don't get the message, the "other crisis" may soon devour what's left of our schools, and the college building will stand an empty shell, reminding this generation of stubborn indifference.